

United States Bankruptcy Court
for the District of Rhode Island

Minutes of May 25, 2000 Meeting of the Attorney Advisory Committee

The first meeting of the Bankruptcy Court's Attorney Advisory Committee was held at the Clerk's office on Thursday, May 25, 2000 at 3:30pm.

Attendance: The following members were in attendance:

Pat Antonelli
Bill Hague
Mark Buckley
Lisa Geremia
Chris Lefebvre
Tom Quinn
Charlie Pisaturo
Bill Hague
Sheryl Serreze
Dave Reilly
John Rao

Court Personnel
Susan Thurston
Michelle Torres

Committee member Peter Furness was absent.

Meeting Discussion:

The meeting was called to order by Susan Thurston, Clerk of Court. Michelle Torres was introduced as the Management Analyst for the Bankruptcy Court, who will also be assisting the committee with its work. A brief introduction and welcome was made, followed by a discussion of the objectives of the committee -- which are to provide advise and assistance to the court with strategic planning, automation initiatives and legal education needs. It was decided that meetings would be held quarterly throughout the year and the committee agreed that Thursday afternoons were good.

A review of the court's current projects took place, including a demonstration and overview of the court's website. A discussion was held about other information to be included on the site, as well as maintaining the timeliness of the current data, especially the calendar. One of the features that needs to be fixed on the site is the Court's opinions retrieval. This function is being actively worked on by the court's lead programmer and should be ready in the next month or so.

A short discussion took place concerning the new electronic noticing program that will soon be offered by the court. This will allow attorneys to receive notice of court hearings and orders by e-mail or fax, as opposed to mail. The committee was provided written literature about the program, which is due out this summer. Some concern was expressed about having one attorney assume the responsibility for receiving the e-mail notices and this is a subject that will require further discussion once the program becomes available locally.

A review of the new AutoCOP program was also discussed, which is the court's new automated case opening program. This program allows the court to open the case and docket all the lead case opening events in 5 minutes as opposed to what used to take about 30 minutes and be multi-stepped. Also, the trustee is automatically assigned and the section 341 notice is transmitted at the same time. The main complaint about the new program is with the automatic selection of trustees which limits how many cases are assigned to a particular trustee at a time. The determination of how many cases are assigned at a time is made by the U.S. Trustee's office and attorneys are advised to direct their issues to that office.

The Committee next discussed the new projects that are currently in development at the court including digital sound recording (coming this summer); the fax/e-mail noticing program (also coming this summer); a 341 calendar on the website and a different interface on the case lookup section of the website called WebPacer (coming within a few months).

Future automation projects that were discussed included a next generation case management system (known as CM/ECF) which will include electronic case filing (probably within the next 18 to 24 months), and some courtroom technology features, such as document presentation systems. As the court prepares for CM/ECF, the committee will be called upon to assist with developing local rules to accommodate this new technology.

Next, the Committee discussed the bankruptcy bar's legal education needs. A periodic "Food for Thought" brown bag lunch program was considered to address such topics as exemptions, reaffirmations, court procedures etc. The committee preferred short topics that can be addressed in a one hour time slot, and which would provide CLE credit. These topics could be taught by attorneys, court staff or the bankruptcy judge or law clerk. In addition to attorney attendance, some topics might be useful to support staff too. At the next meeting, this topic will be further explored and developed.

Another educational area of concern is with state court judges in bankruptcy matters. Some time ago, the ABI developed a written program for state court judges which was presented in Rhode Island. Since then, the Bankruptcy Judge forwards copies of decisions to the state judges that maybe of benefit to them covering relief from stay, discharge violations, family law issues, etc. Beyond this, there is no current program in place to address this educational need. The Clerk will bring this matter to the Court's attention and report back at the next meeting on possible suggestions.

Lastly, the committee discussed the local rules that may be required in conjunction with electronic filing of cases. This topic will be discussed at a future meeting as more information is available from the ECF pilot courts.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 14, 2000 at 3:30 pm at the Clerk's office conference room.

The meeting adjourned at 5:15pm.